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Viewing cable 04BRUSSELS3782, U.S.-EU CONSULTATIONS ON CAUCASUS, CENTRAL ASIA

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
04BRUSSELS3782	2004-09-08 14:36	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Brussels

Appears in these articles:

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BRUSSELS 003782

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR DAS LAURA KENNEDY, EUR/CACEN, EUR/ERA TOM
LERSTEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/08/2014

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SUBJECT: U.S.-EU CONSULTATIONS ON CAUCASUS, CENTRAL ASIA
(COEST)

REF: USEU TODAY 09/02/04

Classified By: USEU POLOFF TODD HUIZINGA, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: On September 1 EUR DAS Laura Kennedy held semi-annual consultations with the EU on Caucasus and Central Asia (COEST). Caucasus discussions concentrated on establishing a political process to resolve the South Ossetia conflict (Kennedy met separately on South Ossetia with Heikki Talvitie, EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus, who had just returned from the region -- see ref), and on reviewing the issues in play in Nagorno-Karabakh with an eye toward developing a comprehensive plan to move forward. Regarding both conflicts, interlocutors focused on getting the Russians to play a positive role and work with, rather than seek to exclude, the OSCE. COEST participants consistently emphasized the need for promoting regional cooperation in both the Caucasus and Central Asia. On Central Asia, both sides agreed on the importance of building civil society and coordinating U.S. and EU promotion of democratic reform and development assistance. Noting this summer's terrorist attacks in Uzbekistan, the EU said the Uzbeks had asked them to designate Hizb-ut Tahrir as a terrorist group (the U.S. has not designated Hizb-ut Tahrir).
END SUMMARY.

SOUTH OSSETIA: STARTING A POLITICAL PROCESS

12. (C) Jan Lucas Van Hoorn, Director of the Southeast and Eastern Europe Department in the Dutch MFA (the Netherlands is the current EU president), said the key in South Ossetia was to keep hostilities from flaring up and introduce

confidence-building measures. He supported Tbilisi OSCE HOM Roy Reeve's idea of setting up confidence-building working groups focused on key issues. After those groups had made progress, added van Hoorn, then a higher-level process could begin, either via the Joint Control Commission (JCC) or by reviving the Baden process, as proposed by the U.S. Van Hoorn noted that the EU would have its Cooperation Council meetings with all three Caucasus countries on September 14. On September 13, Dutch FM Bot and EU HighRep Solana would have dinner with the three FM's from Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Van Hoorn implied that the EU intended to raise and endorse Reeve's CBM proposal at these meetings.

MEANING OF SOUTH OSSETIAN "AUTONOMY?"

13. (C) Van Hoorn lamented the lack of clarity on how the Georgians planned to flesh out the concept of autonomy for South Ossetia. He said Georgia should be encouraged to make progress on defining the autonomy for Ajara; that would send an important, positive signal to the South Ossetians and the Russians. Kennedy noted the difference between the situations but agreed that the definition of autonomy was a crucial element for the future of South Ossetia. She underlined the role of positive public signals; she said, for example, that supportive statements such as Georgia had made to the Russians regarding the recent hostage-taking in North Ossetia could go a long way toward defusing the tensions with Russia that were complicating the search for a solution in South Ossetia. We had consistently urged Saakashvili to cease inflammatory rhetoric. Now that he had disengaged militarily, we need to push the Russians to engage politically.

ABKHAZIA: PROGRESS AFTER ELECTIONS?

14. (C) On Abkhazia, Kennedy suggested that the U.S. and the EU explore the possibilities for new movement after the October Abkhaz elections, perhaps by revitalizing the "Friends of Georgia" process. Van Hoorn agreed, but said the Dutch experience as 2003 OSCE Chairman-in-Office (CiO) had been that Abkhazia is "the hardest nut to crack" of all of the conflicts in the region. He suggested that Georgian public acceptance of the concept of dual Georgian/Russian nationality for South Ossetians and Abkhazians could lead to progress in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Kennedy cautioned that such a move would reward the Russian policy of liberally granting Russian citizenship in those regions, and could be unacceptable to the Georgians.

IMPORTANCE OF ECONOMIC REFORM

15. (C) Both sides agreed that continued pursuit of economic reform was a key factor in increasing political stability in Georgia and the Caucasus in general. Aid channelled through the Millennium Challenge Corporation -- with its emphasis on reform -- was key in Georgia. Also, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline would be vital to the future of Georgia not only as an energy corridor, but also as an example to other investors of the attractiveness of doing business there. Kurt Juul, Head of Unit for South Caucasus and Central Asia in the External Affairs Directorate of the European Commission, said Commission President Romano Prodi planned to underscore the importance of economic reform when he visits the region on September 16. Both sides agreed on the importance of sending a clear message to Georgian President Saakashvili that he must not divert his focus from the need to follow through on his economic reform initiatives.

NAGORNO-KARABAKH: STATE OF PLAY AND RUSSIA

16. (C) Van Hoorn noted that the September 14 EU Cooperation Council meeting with the three Caucasus countries would take place just before the CIS Summit in Astana. Now that Azerbaijan's President Aliyev has been in office for a year, the EU hopes to see a clear indication that he will make progress, van Hoorn asserted. He added that Armenia was concerned, with good reason, about being excluded from the development of infrastructure in the region.

17. (C) Kennedy noted that the Azeri and Armenian foreign ministers had met in Prague earlier in the week. U.S. Minsk Group Co-Chair Steve Mann had reported on a positive meeting; its focus on technical matters -- access issues, for example -- was useful. Perhaps after another similar session, the parties could consider an overall plan. The Azeri foreign minister seemed to be growing into his role. Kennedy agreed that the Astana meeting between the leaders was the next key step.

18. (C) COEST participants discussed the need to watch carefully Russian President Putin's upcoming meeting with his Armenian and Azeri counterparts in Astana. Putin had essentially invited himself, possibly intending to cut the OSCE and the Minsk Group out of future negotiations. Michael Swann, South Caucasus and Central Asia Desk Officer in the EU Council Secretariat, remarked that some -- especially in Azerbaijan -- had "had it" with the Minsk Group, and might thus be receptive to Putin's efforts to sideline it. Van Hoorn underscored that the EU would have to provide Azerbaijan and Armenia with a clear message in support of the Minsk Group at the upcoming Cooperation Council. Kennedy added that we also needed to urge the Russians at all levels to endorse the OSCE and the Minsk Group -- of which Russia is one of the co-chairs. Van Hoorn said he expected the EU would take this up at the November 11 EU-Russia Summit in The Hague.

CAUCASUS: A REGIONAL APPROACH

19. (C) COEST participants consistently emphasized the need for a regional -- vice country-by-country -- approach to both the Caucasus and Central Asia. As Juul portrayed the Commission point of view, the U.S. and the EU have regional assistance programs, but interactions with the recipients tend to focus on individual countries -- this provided each with the opportunity to blame its problems and failings on its neighbors. Taking a collective approach and working with recipient countries as a unit could help break this pattern, he suggested. On the Caucasus specifically, he commented that Commission President Prodi's September 16 meetings with all three leaders (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia) would provide the best near-term opportunity to reinforce messages. He pointed to the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) as an example of the EU -- or at least Commission -- interest in addressing the region more broadly. Energy would be a particularly important agenda item in EU discussions with these three countries, he said. Armenia's nuclear power plant -- now run by Russians -- was unsafe; the EU had been trying for years to get it closed. According to Juul, the Commission was prepared to convene a donors' conference to raise funds for alternate energy sources; he had hoped the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) would be a source of contributions, but it appeared that the MCA was focused on poverty reduction instead.

CENTRAL ASIA: BUILDING CIVIL SOCIETY

110. (C) On Central Asia, both sides agreed on the difficulty and importance of helping to build civil society. Swann commented that the EU had to deal with "substandard governments and substandard civil society" -- the governments were suspicious of efforts to reach out to NGOs and other groups, while NGOs and the press tended to take irresponsible actions that aroused further government suspicion. The U.S. and EU, suggested van Hoorn, needed to call all parties on their behavior -- and to encourage further contact between government and civil society representatives.

CENTRAL ASIA: PROMOTING DEMOCRACY, COORDINATING AID

111. (C) Kennedy solicited EU support for several assistance projects in Central Asia. Money was still needed to complete the bridge from Tajikistan into Afghanistan and the road leading up to the bridge, she said, and an EU contribution would be appreciated. The EU declined to respond directly, but noted that the EU would sign its Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Tajikistan in October. Juul pointed out that again, the key was a regional approach; and Afghanistan is also a part of the region. He said the Commission was trying to get the Central Asian countries to work together wherever possible on poverty reduction, fighting drugs and crime, and governance.

112. (C) Key to the regional approach, Kennedy pointed out, was the OSCE. Kazakhstan's desire for 2009 OSCE Chairmanship offered the U.S. and EU the opportunity to press for political reform and better respect for human rights. An important near-term indicator would be how Kazakhstan conducted its September elections. Van Hoorn agreed, saying Kazakhstan today was a poor candidate, but the decision doesn't need to be made until 2008. In the meantime, the EU has not reached a "common position" on Kazakhstan's bid but will wait and see how it evolves. Given Russia's concerns with the OSCE, he said, it would be "interesting" to have a CIS country as chairman. However, he noted that Kazakhstan had signed the CIS statement critical of the OSCE; he added that the EU had pointed out to the Kazakhs that this was inconsistent with seeking the OSCE chairmanship. Van Hoorn said Commissioner Patten had leaned heavily on Kazakhstan

during his March visit on issues such as the proposed media law and elections. The media law has since been withdrawn, and Van Hoorn concluded that U.S. and EU efforts can lead to changes in Kazakhstan.

¶13. (C) It was also important that Turkmenistan, despite its autocratic dictatorship, not be isolated. A central factor in keeping engaged with Turkmenistan would be to find a successor for the OSCE HOM in Ashgabat, Paraschiva Badescu, who could be equally effective in pressing for human rights and civil society. Kennedy urged U.S.-EU cooperation in the search for the right successor; the worst signal that could be sent to Ashgabat would be if no qualified candidate could be found.

¶14. (C) Returning to the topic of civil society and coordinating assistance, Kennedy urged the EU to support independent media in Kyrgyzstan by funding the Freedom House printing press there. Juul noted that the Commission's TACIS program was not structured for this type of assistance, but Van Hoorn and the Council Secretariat were receptive to using the EU's COEST Working Group to identify possible EU member states who could provide bilateral assistance. (USEU subsequently provided the EU Council with a non-paper outlining the need for donors to support independent media in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and with details on the road spur between the Afghan border and the Tajik town of Dusti.)

UZBEKISTAN AND TERRORISM

¶15. (C) EU representatives were very interested in how Tashkent had reacted to the U.S. decision earlier this year not to certify Uzbekistan, and sought U.S. views on the likelihood of instability in a post-Karimov era. Kennedy noted our hopes to continue to engage Uzbekistan on the reform front; we hoped to send a senior official to discuss economic reform. Noting this summer's terrorist attacks on US and Israeli embassies, Van Hoorn asked whether we had added a group called Hizb-ut Tahrir to our list of terrorist groups; he said that the EU would consider this soon but he was not himself convinced that the group should be so designated. Van der Togt opined that there are no legal grounds for banning them in most other EU countries, especially given the group's vague message -- it is hard, he said, to determine exactly what the organization stands for or intends to do. Van der Togt added that the Uzbeks raise this group with the Dutch "all the time" in meetings. (NOTE: Uzbekistan has also approached the U.S. repeatedly with the same request, but the USG has not designated the group as a terrorist organization. END NOTE.)

¶16. (C) COMMENT: In the course of discussions, Kennedy suggested that the agenda for the next COEST meeting include a more detailed discussion of coordination of development assistance and offered to include a representative from EUR/ACE on the U.S. delegation for that purpose. The EU welcomed the proposal. END COMMENT.

¶17. (U) This message has been cleared by EUR DAS Laura Kennedy.

SCHNABEL